



**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
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April 7, 2009

TO: Supervisor Don Knabe, Chairman
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

FROM: Wendy L. Watanabe *Wendy L. Watanabe*
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **FREE TO BE FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY – A DEPARTMENT OF
CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES PROVIDER**

We have completed a contract compliance review of Free to Be Foster Family Agency (Free or Agency), a Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Foster Family Agency service provider.

Background

DCFS contracts with Free, a private non-profit community-based organization to recruit, train and certify foster care parents for the supervision of developmentally delayed children placed in foster care by DCFS. Once the Agency places a child, it is required to monitor the placement until the child is discharged from the program.

Free is required to hire qualified social workers to provide case management and act as a liaison between DCFS and foster parents. The Agency oversees a total of 38 certified foster homes in which 51 DCFS children were placed at the time of our review. Free is located in the Fifth District.

DCFS paid Free a negotiated monthly rate, per child placement, established by the California Department of Social Services' (CDSS) Foster Care Rates Bureau. Free received \$4,386 per month, per child. Out of these funds, the Agency paid the foster

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parents between \$1,750 and \$2,350 per month, per child. DCFS paid Free approximately \$608,000 during Fiscal Year 2007-08.

Purpose/Methodology

The purpose of the review was to determine whether Free was providing the services outlined in their Program Statement and the County contract. We reviewed certified foster parent files, children's case files, personnel files and interviewed the Agency's staff. We also visited a number of certified foster homes, interviewed the foster parents and observed the children.

Results of Review

The foster parents stated that the services they received from Free exceeded their expectations. They also indicated that the extensive and specialized training and support they received from Free helped them care for the developmentally disabled children placed in their homes. The children also appeared to be well cared for and happy. In addition, Free ensured that the Agency's social workers possessed the required qualifications and their caseloads were within the required guidelines.

Free needs to ensure that foster homes and foster parent files are in compliance with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. For example:

- One (50%) of the two homes visited did not adequately secure the kitchen knives.
- One (50%) of two foster parent certification files did not contain a valid CPR certificate. Prior to the conclusion of our review, the foster parent obtained a valid CPR certificate.

The details of our review along with recommendations for corrective action are attached.

Review of Report

We discussed our report with Free on September 22, 2008. In their attached response, the Agency indicates agreement with our findings and the actions they are taking to implement the recommendations. We also notified DCFS of the results of our review.

We thank Free for their cooperation and assistance during this review. Please call me if you have any questions or your staff may contact Don Chadwick at (213) 253-0301.

WLW:MMO:DC:AA

Attachment

c: William T Fujioka, Chief Executive Officer
Patricia S. Ploehn, Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Ted Myers, Chief Deputy Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Susan Kerr, Senior Deputy Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Patricia Shields, Chair, Board of Directors, Free to Be Foster Family Agency
Audrey Hughes, Executive Director, Free to Be Foster Family Agency
Jean Chen, Community Care Licensing
Public Information Office
Audit Committee

**FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY PROGRAM
FREE TO BE FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY
FISCAL YEAR 2007-08**

BILLED SERVICES

Objective

Determine whether Free to Be Foster Family Agency (Free or Agency) provided program services in accordance with their County contract and California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We visited two of the eight Los Angeles County certified foster homes that Free billed to the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in March and April 2008, and interviewed two foster parents and observed three of the five foster children placed in the two homes. We also reviewed the case files for two foster parents and three children. In addition, we reviewed the Agency's monitoring activity.

Results

The foster parents stated that the services they received from Free exceeded their expectations and the children appeared to be well cared for and happy. However, Free needs to ensure that foster homes adequately secure kitchen knives and that foster parent certification files contain all the required information. For example:

- One (50%) of the two foster homes visited did not adequately secure kitchen knives as required.
- One (50%) of two foster parent certification files did not contain a valid CPR certificate. The CPR certificate had expired in September 2007. Prior to the conclusion of our review, the foster parent obtained a valid CPR certificate.

Recommendations

Free management ensure:

- 1. Staff adequately monitor foster homes to ensure they comply with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.**
- 2. Foster parents adequately secure knives and other items that could pose a potential safety hazard to the children.**
- 3. Foster parent certification files contain all the required information including valid CPR certificates.**

CLIENT VERIFICATION**Objective**

Determine whether the program participants received the services that Free billed to DCFS.

Verification

We observed three children placed in two Free certified foster homes and interviewed two foster parents to confirm the services Free billed to DCFS.

Results

The foster parents stated that the services they received from Free exceeded their expectations and that the extensive and specialized training and support they received from Free helped them care for the developmentally disabled children placed in their homes. Although the children were not able to fully participate in interviews, they appeared to be well cared for and happy. In addition, one child stated that she enjoyed living with her foster parent.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING/CASELOAD LEVELS**Objective**

Determine whether Free social workers' caseloads do not exceed 15 placements and whether the supervising social worker does not supervise more than six social workers, as required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We interviewed Free's clinical director and reviewed caseload statistics and payroll records for the Agency's social workers and supervising social worker.

Results

Overall, Free's five social workers carried an average caseload of ten cases and the Agency's supervising social worker supervised an average of five social workers.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS**Objective**

Determine whether Free's staff possess the education and work experience qualifications required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. In addition, determine whether the Agency conducted hiring clearances prior to hiring their staff and provided ongoing training to staff.

Verification

We interviewed Free's clinical director and reviewed each staff's personnel file for documentation to confirm their education and work experience qualifications, hiring clearances and ongoing training.

Results

The Agency's clinical director, supervising social worker and social workers possessed the education and work experience required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. Free also conducted the required hiring clearances and provided ongoing training for staff working on the County contract.

Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.

PRIOR YEAR FOLLOW-UP**Objective**

Determine the status of the recommendations reported in the prior monitoring review completed by the Auditor-Controller.

Verification

We verified whether the outstanding recommendations from the Fiscal Year 2006-07 monitoring review were implemented. The report was issued on July 5, 2007.

Results

The prior monitoring report contained two outstanding recommendations. Free implemented both recommendations.


Recommendation

There are no recommendations for this section.



Date: October 6, 2008

To: Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke, Chair
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Don Knabe
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

From: Audrey Hughes 
Administrator
Free to Be – Foster Family Agency

Subject: Response to Agency Contract Review

Free to Be Programs received the agency contract review report dated September 22, 2008 from the County of Los Angeles, Department of Auditor-Controller. We agree with the findings of the report and will implement the three recommendations as follows.

Recommendation 1: *Staff adequately monitor foster homes to ensure they comply with the County contract and Title 22 regulations.*

Social workers conduct health and safety checks each time they visit the home. Formal quality assurance checks are completed quarterly by the social workers. Each year, prior to certification, quality assurance staff complete a comprehensive review of the home and the files for the certified family and the children residing in the home. These QA checks ensure that families are compliant with the County contract and Title 22 regulations.

Recommendation 2: *Foster parents adequately secure knives and other items that could pose a potential safety hazard to the children.*

All certified homes store knives so that they are inaccessible to the children in the home. As a result of this review, all homes serving DCFS children will be required to keep knives locked when they are not in use.

Recommendation 3: *Foster parent certification files contain all the required information including valid CPR certificates.*

Free to Be – FFA Quality Assurance Personnel monitor family files routinely to ensure that the files contain all required information. This information is stored on Foster Trak. As a result of this audit, the agency now maintains an additional list of the expiration dates of all First Aid and CPR cards. Families are required to complete the training before the previous certification expires.

If you have any questions or require any further information, please contact me at (818) 366-6682.